

FOSTERING IN OXFORDSHIRE



Working
together
to change
Lives...

If you have space in your heart and space in your home, don't hesitate to foster.



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



Working together to change Lives...

FOSTERING

Fostering provides an important opportunity for children who are unable to live with their parents to thrive in a secure, caring and loving home environment for as long as they need it.

It is an amazing and wonderful thing for you, your family and the child.

We are proud to provide a first rate fostering service to meet the needs of children and young people in Oxfordshire. We work in partnership with our foster carers to provide the highest quality care so that the children and young people we care for flourish.

Our brochure will help you with all the information you need to take the next step to becoming a foster carer. But if there is anything you are unsure about, we are here to help answer any questions, you may have.

Find out if you can foster!

Contact our experienced recruitment team who will be happy to talk you through the process and have a chat with you.

Call: 0800 783 5724

Email: fostering@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Read on to find out more...

Could you give a special child a loving home and a stable future?

An introduction to fostering

Fostering with Oxfordshire County Council

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Frequently asked fostering questions

Looking to transfer from another fostering agency

Help and further information

Alternative formats of this publication can be made available on request. These include other languages, LARGE PRINT, Braille, audio cassette, computer disk or email. Please telephone 0800 7835 724.



AN INTRODUCTION TO FOSTERING

A child's life should be a happy one, free from responsibility and sadness, but unfortunately for some children this is not possible. Many children need support and love to see them through difficult times. Our foster carers look after these children by offering them a place to call home for as long as they need it.

Why are children fostered?

There are several reasons why a child may not be able to live with their own family, it could be due to illness, bereavement or family breakdown. Sometimes they will have experienced, neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse and because of this they would have been removed from their family to keep them safe.

Foster carers provide a safe, stable, secure and nurturing environment either short term or long term and also provides the child with the opportunity to keep in contact with their own family members. We will be working with the family with the aim for them to return home whenever possible. If this is not possible, they may be adopted, or stay with foster carers until they can live independently.

Can anyone foster?

There is no such thing as a typical foster carer, just like the children they look after, carers come from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures and religions. Actually, almost anyone can become a foster carer. It takes someone with determination, a big heart and patience to work through the good and the difficult times. With the dedication to make a positive and long lasting difference to the children and young people you foster.

Do you have what it takes?

- Do you have a spare room?
- Do you have the time and energy to invest in a child?
- Can you welcome a child into your own home and make them feel part of the family?
- Are you flexible and understanding?
- Are you up for a challenge, resilient and have determination?
- Do you want to work with us and be part of a professional dedicated team?

If you have space in your heart and space in your home, do not hesitate to foster.

There are many different opportunities, we will help you think about what is right for you, your family and the children we need to find families for.

Check out our frequently asked questions on page 9.



THE ROLE OF OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The local authority is responsible for the children needing to be fostered. It is our aim that these children will be placed in foster families who live in Oxfordshire, so they remain close to other family members, friends and schools which helps them to feel safe and secure. It is our aim that our children are with foster families who have been assessed by us and who we will support from then on. This ensures that the fostering placements made have every chance to succeed as we know you and we know the children that will be placed in your care.

We will also be working with the families and in some instances the courts to decide the best plan for the child's long term future. Our role is to work with the children, the families, our foster carers and others, all with the same goal to create the best possible opportunities and outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

What can foster carers expect from us?

- To provide a team around the child involved in decisions
- To have access to high-quality guidance and support
- To have your professionalism and commitment valued
- To actively seek feedback and listen to what you say
- To be provided with the best learning and development opportunities
- To be there when you need us

FOSTERING WITH OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Oxfordshire County Council provides you with a whole fostering service all under one roof with access to all the support you will need.

Support & training

It is essential that foster carers are given the support and training required to ensure that you are equipped to provide the level of care needed to look after vulnerable children. We will ensure that you are respected and listened to. That you are involved and considered in the decisions made about the children you care for and that you feel safe and confident in what you do.... And that is our promise to you.

You will be part of a team of professionals who are all working with the same goal. Your dedicated supervising social worker will support and guide you through your journey as a foster carer and with any placements you may have. You will also have access to our local network of support groups and experienced foster carers who provide peer to peer support.

We have a comprehensive range of training courses available to you, there are some that we require that you complete and others that we know you will find helpful, if you are caring for children with more complex needs. Training provides you with valuable skills to help you to grow in confidence and prepare you for the challenges to come. All training is free and is a great opportunity for you to meet up with other carers. Training is offered locally at times that are convenient to you.

Allowances and additional fees for foster carers

Foster carers are paid allowances, expenses and a skills payment when applicable. The skills payments are based on the additional skills, experience and training and the type of fostering you choose.

How much will I get paid?

Foster carers receive an allowance to support the cost of looking after a child.

Payment for Skills

Foster carers who meet the criteria for our payment for skills scheme will receive a skills payment in addition to the child's allowance. The scheme is based on a foster carers' experience, training and evidence that they meet the required competencies. There are four levels:

- Level 1: you are paid the children's allowance only
- Level 2 you will need to have completed several training courses.
- Levels 3 and 4 would be caring for children with complex needs.

Foster carers get paid allowances rather than salaries. This means that, although you should inform the Benefits Office and tax authorities, your state benefits and your tax position will not usually be affected.

Additional allowances

In addition to a weekly payment, carers receive the following financial support:

- Festivity, birthday and holiday allowances
- Essential fostering equipment
- Emergency clothing allowance
- Mileage and travel expenses
- Long service bonus
- Refer a Friend scheme

For more information and to see current rates please read our Fees & Allowances booklet ([link](#))

So, what else do we provide for you?

- The recruitment team who will guide you through your journey to becoming a foster carer
- Your own social worker offering you support and advice
- A children's social worker responsible for the fostered child
- The virtual school supporting foster carers and the children they care for relating to matters of education and learning
- The Attach team who offer extensive therapeutic support whenever you need it
- Support for the children, this may include activities they enjoy and helping them develop their skills and confidence.
- The Carer Co-ordinators: are experienced foster carers who can provide advice and support
- Regular local support groups offered in various locations around the county
- Support from Oxfordshire Foster Care Association creating fun times for foster families & a voice for Oxfordshire foster carers
- You can meet with other foster carers at support groups, training sessions or events, which provides a valuable source of support
- Emergency Duty Team (EDT): this is a support team you can call at any time out of office hours if you have an emergency
- Membership to Fostering Network
- Max card and discounts to other leisure activities



TYPES OF FOSTERING

A guide to foster care schemes in Oxfordshire.

Some children need just a few days or weeks of foster care – others may need a longer period of temporary care while we help their family to get over more serious difficulties or until we can place them with extended family, long-term carers or adoptive parents.

We help you to decide which type of foster care will work best for you and we work hard to ensure that every foster placement we make has the best opportunity to succeed. The types of foster care are:

Short Term Fostering

For some children, we need to find a home for just a short period of time. This can be anything from overnight to a few months or up to a couple of years until we are sure of the child's future. We will be working with the family with the aim for the child to return home or considering other options i.e. adoption or long term fostering. You then help prepare and support the child for their next move.

Long Term Fostering

Long term fostering is providing permanency and security to a child until they reach adulthood and preparing them to live independently. This includes everything from teaching them the skills of budgeting, cooking and cleaning alongside planning and supporting them through education and finding work. They are very much part of your family. These children need to be cared for throughout the remainder of their childhood but they quite often maintain links with their foster family well into adulthood.

Relief Care or Respite Care

Supporting families or other foster carers by providing relief care at weekends or during school holidays. You are providing the opportunity for families to have a break so they can continue to care for the young person long term.

Parent & Baby Carers

Some new parents have very limited support and advice available to them to help them care for their new baby. Often, they do not have the benefit of a stable and supportive home to help them develop the necessary skills to look after their baby. You provide a foster home for the parent and their child. Parent and baby foster carers need to be confident in caring for babies and be able to work sensitively with a new parent. You will need to have a spare room and one carer based at home full time. You'll be on hand for supervision, advice and support for the new parent. You'll work with them with the aim of helping them gain the skills to be able to look after their baby independently in the future.

OCC Treatment Foster Care - for children aged 3-11

This type of care is provided for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties who need this intensity of intervention. Treatment foster carers work alongside members of a multi-professional team. We are looking for carers who are willing to be part of a therapeutic team, to provide this type of fostering for up to 10 months. You then prepare and support the child to move on successfully to a more permanent situation, which may be back home or with other foster carers or adopters.

Short Break Scheme

The Short Break Scheme offers children with disabilities regular planned breaks, with you, in your home. This can give the children new experiences, the opportunity to gain some independence, grow in confidence, and make new friends. Alongside supporting the family by offering them a break.

Disability fostering

We support people like you to take care of children with disabilities, so that they can experience family life, and grow up feeling safe, secure and loved. You don't need experience of disability to be a disability foster carer, whatever skills you have we will value them and teach you new ones.

Emergency fostering

Emergency foster placements come at short notice when we need a safe place for them to stay until we can make decisions about their situation. They stay only for a couple of days whilst we plan their next move.

Sibling fostering

We always aim to keep siblings together wherever possible. You would be providing the opportunity for brothers and sisters to live together in a safe and happy environment.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

These young people are separated from their family and are applying for asylum in this country. It is very important that they stay with families who can make them feel safe and secure, and who can ensure they keep good links with their heritage. This is important as they have already had to leave a family, a home and a country.

Supported lodgings

This is for young people between the ages of 16 & 24 who, for a variety of reasons cannot live at home with their families. As a host you will offer them a room and support them for 10 hours per week to help them to move on to a more independent living arrangement.

You don't need to know right away which type of care you can offer, we will help you find the fostering opportunity that will fit in your life.

OTHER TYPES OF CARE

Family & Friends Care

Family and friends care is when someone close to a child - for example grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, step parents, other relatives or family friends - come forward to care for the child when they are not able to live at home.

Family and friends care means that children are given every opportunity to thrive and be happy within their own family network. This gives children greater security from feeling loved and comfortable in an environment they are familiar with. If relatives or friends do not offer to care for a child, then that child might need to be cared for by foster carers who do not know the child.





“Fostering has proved to be the most rewarding thing we have ever done. It has been fascinating and rewarding to watch the development of the young people and the gradual increasing trust in their relationship. It has been an added bonus to observe the positive way our immediate and wider family have related to the children”

THE FOSTERING JOURNEY

A guide to foster care schemes in Oxfordshire.

There are nine steps to becoming a foster carer, we will be there every step of the way to give you support and answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions no matter what they are please give us a call 0800 783 5724 because we will be happy to help.

1. Contact us

Everybody is welcome to find out more about fostering. You can do this by phone, email, via the website or from our Facebook page.

Don't worry, you may have some queries or concerns, but we are be happy to answer any questions at all. You can also come along to an information event, to find out where and when you can either check out our website or phone 0800 783 5724

2. Enquiry

We will take some details from you and have chat about your initial thoughts, then if you feel ready to proceed, we will talk you through the next steps and arrange an initial home visit.

3. Initial home visit

One of our experienced recruitment team will visit you at home. We will discuss your expectations, your life experience and give you lots more information so we can think if this is the right time to get started with your application.

4. Application form

Once we have received your completed application form you will be assigned a social worker to do your assessment. We will support you throughout this process.

5. Assessment

This can take anywhere between 4 and 6 months. Your dedicated social worker visits you regularly so they can get to know your family. By getting to know you we will be able to choose the type of fostering that will fit in with your family. We will also gather a number of personal references and complete a medical, local authority and DBS checks to ensure that we make the best placements for the children.

6. Skills to foster

While the assessment is going on, you'll be invited to attend training. It is designed to teach you the skills needed to be ready to foster and to give you guidance and advice. Its fun, informative and gives you an idea of what lies ahead. Its also a great opportunity to meet others also going through the same journey and you get the chance to talk with a foster carer.

7. Recommendation Report

At the end of the assessment your social worker writes a report that recommends you as a foster carer to the fostering panel.

8. Fostering Panel

The panel is a group of educational and care professionals, who will make a recommendation for your approval. You can attend along with your social worker to give you support and will also prepare you beforehand.

9. Approval and first placement

Once approved you will be ready for your first placement. Your allocated social worker will continue to support you and start to match you with a child.



FREQUENTLY ASKED FOSTERING QUESTIONS

These are some FAQ's on fostering.

If you cannot see your question, please contact us on 0800 783 5724.

1. Am I too old?

Probably not! You need to have life experience and maturity and be able to meet the needs of the child.

2. I'm single/divorced/lesbian/gay – does that matter?

No, we recruit all types of carers with a wide variety of life experiences.

3. What about my own children, how will it impact on them?

Being part of a fostering family is a very positive thing, so much so that many birth children go on to foster themselves one day.

However, we know that fostering will impact on your birth child in lots of ways, but we will support them and give them plenty of opportunities to share any worries they may have. We make sure they feel part of fostering from the start of your application and from then onwards. We have a birth child ambassador and run regular events for children who foster so they get support, some treats as our way of saying "thank you" for all that they do.

4. I have never had children of my own – does that matter?

Not at all. You need to be able to understand the problems the children have and the ways they might react, especially when they are frightened or angry or find it difficult to trust people.

5. I work, would I be able to foster?

It depends on the type of fostering you want to do. Some children and young people need a carer available full time, others don't. It also depends on whether you could get appropriate time off, for instance for holiday periods, or if a child is sick.

If you could only look after a child at the weekends or other short periods, you may be able to become a relief or short break carer.

6. I smoke – does it matter?

Due to the potentially life shortening effects of smoking and government advice in this area, we have smoking and health policy for foster carers and aim to approve non-smoking carers.

7. I have a medical condition – can I still foster?

Yes. If you have a medical condition or disability that is not life threatening and does not affect normal daily life, we would be happy to hear from you. You just need to have the energy to care for a child.

8. I don't own my own home – does it matter?

No as long as you have a stable tenancy. We advise you to inform your landlord that you will be fostering.

9. I don't have a spare room - can I still foster?

You do need a spare room unless you are considering fostering a baby under 2yrs of age when you would need to be at home full time and have the child share your bedroom. However we prefer to approve foster carers who can offer to care for a wider range of ages as we do not always have babies to place with our carers. If you do not have a spare room and you are living in rented accommodation we may be able to assist you with housing, so please still contact us. We can discuss your individual situation and may be able to broker enhanced accommodation that will meet the family's needs with the relevant District Council.

10. Do you need foster carers who come from a mixed heritage or from a minority group?

Yes, children who need looking after come from a wide range of backgrounds. We need a wide range of foster carers so we can meet all their needs. However, because of the need to communicate with outside agencies and to attend meetings about the fostered child, it is necessary for the main carer to speak English.

11. If I wanted to foster a child with a disability, what sort of disabilities are the children likely to have?

All of the children will have some degree of learning disability, additionally they may need help with communication or mobility, or support to access activities and opportunities that other children can do unaided. Some children will need to use a wheelchair and some will have additional health needs. BUT, what you are able to offer a child will be part of your assessment so don't worry, we won't ask you to do something you do not feel confident about.

12. I have a police record, would I be suitable?

You must declare all offences, no matter how long ago. We check all applicants with the police and offences against children will automatically rule people out. For other circumstances we will consider the individual situation.

13. How much money would I get?

Foster carers get paid allowances to cover costs involved with having a child live with you and a skills level payment for you depending on experience. Fostering payments are made only when you have a child in your care but not paid between placements. You should inform the benefits office and your tax authority. However, your state benefits and your tax position will not usually be affected.

14. I don't have any formal qualifications – does that matter?

No problem. As long as you are able to encourage the young person to get the best out of his or her life, that's what's important. You need to be energetic, patient and child centered, with a good sense of humour. We'll give you lots of help and advice, and we provide training that will prepare you to foster. Once approved, you will be required to complete a number of training courses which will help contribute to your professional development.

15. I had a difficult childhood – but I'd like to help other children, does that matter?

Many foster carers have had difficult experiences in their lives- what is important is what they have made of the experiences, and that they now have a secure lifestyle and a willingness to work with us.

16. How do I apply?

Just give us a call on 0800 783 5724. We will ask some details from you and arrange a visit from a social worker. If you decide that fostering is for you, we'll start the assessment, which is a process that will take between 4 and 6 months.

17. Still undecided?

There are likely to be many questions that you would like to ask that are not answered above. Give us a ring on 0800 783 5724.





"The benefits are seeing them grow in to confident children, they will ask for things and they shine, they lift their chins up and become confident little people, those are the moments when you think 'wow, we are doing a really good job.'"

DO YOU FOSTER WITH ANOTHER IFA (FOSTERING AGENCY) OR LOCAL AUTHORITY?

If you already foster with an independent fostering agency (IFA) or another local authority and wish to transfer to us, you can speak with one of our experienced fostering social workers who understands the issues. This will help you explore confidentially whether a move is right for you and give you the time you need to consider this big step.

How long will it take to transfer?

We have a great deal of experience of working with foster carers who transfer; our aim is to make the process as easy and as smooth as possible for you. You'll find the process of transferring significantly easier and quicker than your original approval. You won't be out of pocket if you decide to transfer, our allowances and skills payments are very competitive.

How will the transfer happen?

Once you decide to transfer we allocate one of our fostering social workers to complete the assessment, who will contact your current agency to discuss and agree transfer arrangements - including the timing of your proposed move and how to ensure the transfer will not disrupt or negatively affect any children in placement.

We will arrange with you and your current agency the date at which this new approval will come into effect and the date the old approval will end. We confirm with you, any children in placement and their social workers once the transfer is process has been completed.

Get in touch with us today to find out more about joining Oxfordshire County Council's fostering service. Call on 0800 783 5724.



HELP AND FURTHER INFORMATION

If you are considering fostering a child and want to find out more information, you are welcome to give us a call on 0800 783 5724 and talk to a member of our team or email us at: fostering@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have decided that you would like take the next steps, please give us a call and we can discuss this further with you. We will carry out an initial enquiry which will give us the information we need to find out if you are eligible to become a foster carer. We can then start the process.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Oxfordshire County Council Fostering Team

Other agencies involved in fostering and adoption

Adopt Thames Valley
Regional adoption agency
www.adoptthamesvalley.co.uk/
Tel: 0800 731 0171
Email: adoptthamesvalley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

CoramBAFF
Books & information about adoption and fostering.
www.corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop
Tel: 0300 222 5775
Email: advice@corambaaf.org.uk

The Fostering Network
The Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for everyone with a personal or professional involvement in fostering
Tel: 020 7620 6400
www.fostering.net

Fosterline
Your fostering advice service
Tel: 0800 0407675

First4Adoption for information about adopting a child.
www.first4adoption.org.uk
Tel: 0300 222 0022 to speak to friendly, trained advisors to get impartial information
Email: helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk



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